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SUBJECT: POLITICAL CANNIBALISM IN ZAMBIA'S RULING PARTY

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Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth, reason 1.4, b/d.

11. (C) Summary: Members of President Banda's ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) party recognize that the narrow victory with which they won the recent presidential by-election has exposed the soft underbelly of Zambia's dominant party since 1991. While claiming to want to rebuild and strengthen the party over the next three years, some prominent MMD members are clearly setting themselves up for a presidential candidacy in 2011, but in trying to discredit potential rivals, may find themselves dismembering the party itself. One of these is Katele Kalumba, MP, National Secretary of the MMD and a five-time cabinet member, who had almost nothing good to say about President Banda (or most of his other fellow MMDers) in a November 18 conversation with P/E Chief. End Summary.

Bad Winners

12. (C) Despite having won Zambia's October 30 presidential by-election, the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), which has dominated the Zambian political scene since the end of one-party rule in 1991, is engaging in the types of behavior normally characteristic of losing organizations -- finger pointing, witch hunting, airing of dirty laundry, and suppression of dissension. This defensiveness is undoubtedly due to the uncomfortably (and unprecedented) narrow margin of victory in the recent election (35,000 votes). In addition, certain members of the MMD are setting themselves up for presidential candidacies to succeed Rupiah Banda in 2011, but their ambition may bring the rest of the already-vulnerable party down in the process. One of these is Katele Kalumba, National Secretary of the MMD and currently the third highest ranking member of the party, as there is no party president or vice president since President Mwanawasa's death.

Banda's Cabinet of "Real Dummies"

13. (C) Kalumba was unsparing in his criticism of both President Banda and his cabinet choices in a conversation with P/E Chief November 18. He said MMD's relatively poor showing was due to Banda's poor campaigning, his campaign team's disorganization and miscalculations, as well as division within the party itself. Kalumba said Banda's cabinet choices were also "real dummies." Kalumba claimed that Banda promised both Western and Northern provinces that one of their own would get the vice presidency, but obviously could not fulfill both promises, so he compromised and chose Justice Minister Kunda from Central Province (he is married to a Lozi woman from Western Province). Kalumba added that many of the cabinet members were shuffled into ministries about which they have no expertise, but the selection of someone with a security background, General Shikapwasha, for Information Minister was an "international embarrassment." This choice, on the heels of the arrest of Father Bwalya (reftel), a popular radio host charged with fomenting violence when he broadcast a show critical of the government and election, was "even more stupid than arresting the priest

in the first place." Kalumba was even critical of the widely hailed technocrat Finance Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane, who he claimed was a long time politico and not as technocratic as many claimed (cabinet bios septel).

14. (C) Kalumba said that while waiting for the cabinet to be announced, former Finance Minister Magande and Minister of Local Government and Housing Masebo called Kalumba to complain about the delay. Kalumba told them Banda was "weak and indecisive," which they, in turn, reportedly passed on to Banda. Kalumba claims he owned up to the comment when confronted by Banda and told Banda that he would be the President's personal gadfly, the entire three year term, keeping him on his toes. Magande and Masebo, in our opinion two of the most effective ministers in Mwanawasa's cabinet, were the only two previous ministers completely dismissed from Banda's cabinet. During a September meeting with then-Charge and USAID Director, Magande was equally vocal about his distaste for Banda.

Airing the Dirty Laundry

15. (C) Kalumba's distaste for Banda is widely known. He has engaged in almost daily verbal confrontation on the front pages of Zambia's newspapers with the new Local Government and Housing Minister and party spokesman (and de facto Banda mouthpiece) Benny Tetamashimba. Tetamashimba, who was quoted during the campaign period as having told voters in Banda's home province (Eastern) that they would be beaten if they did not vote for Banda, called for Banda's immediate appointment as party president after the election. Kalumba responded publicly that the party constitution mandates the president must be elected at a party convention. Tetamashimba then told the press that MMD members of parliament whose constituencies were not won by Banda (i.e. Kalumba) should be called to explain themselves. Kalumba responded publicly that voters were capable of making their own decisions. After several rounds of sparring in the press, MMD National Chairman Michael Mabenga attempted to impose some discipline and called for party members to refrain from public arguments.

16. (C) Other members of the party are now apparently taking sides (and ignoring Mabenga's advice). On November 25, the newly appointed Deputy Minister for Science and Technology told the press, "The one who brought the most divisions before the elections and even after the election is Tetamashimba. My advice is for Tetamashimba to shut up and know that he is not the spokesperson of the President. We have got qualified spokespersons... What he gives as party positions are his own statements, which are wrong. He should work as a team player instead of working as an individual because he wants a job." (Banda elevated Tetamashimba from deputy to minister at his ministry.)

A Party in Disarray, by Design

17. (C) As National Chairman, Mabenga is the acting head of the MMD since Mwanawasa's death. According to Kalumba, Mwanawasa, as party President, intentionally left the post of party Vice President vacant, so as to reduce competition from presidential pretenders. Mwanawasa, who Kalumba claims has acquired an undeserved saintly reputation since his death, intentionally kept the party divided to protect his own power base, and now the MMD is paying for it. Kalumba doubted that a party convention would be held to elect a new president and vice president because, if Banda failed to capture the top post, he would find himself in a "Thabo Mbeki situation," challenged by some version of Jacob Zuma. Given Banda's weak showing in the elections, Banda's election as party president is anything but a certainty.

Hope for Anti-Corruption

18. (C) In a rare moment of generosity toward Banda, Kalumba

asserted that Banda is "cleaner than Mwanawasa." Kalumba said Banda had once been accused of malfeasance but was easily exonerated, while Mwanawasa was much more corrupt than most people realized. Furthermore, Kalumba said that Mwanawasa was barely functional after his first stroke, and his wife Maureen had virtually run the country (comment: a common, but unsubstantiated rumor that circulated Lusaka for some time). Kalumba hoped Banda would make permanent and fully fund the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) that Kalumba took credit for establishing. Ironically, Kalumba himself has been indicted for corruption, and he lamented that the "unsubstantiated" case had dragged out in court for more than seven years. When Kalumba was charged with corruption, the national media reported that police were unable to find him until, on the advice of a witch doctor, they removed their underwear to overcome his magical powers of invisibility. Despite these apparent magical powers, Kalumba has had little luck making these corruption charges disappear.

Rebuilding the MMD

¶9. (C) Kalumba, as National Secretary and the third in the party hierarchy after the National Chairman and Deputy National Chairman, said that if Banda runs again in 2011, which was his prerogative, it would be "the end of MMD." Kalumba hopes to rebuild the party before 2011, but his motives are not purely selfless. He said Banda will likely run again, as will Maureen Mwanawasa and Wilhemina Mumba (a local lawyer), but Kalumba "will beat them all," he said with a great deal of confidence. He said he did not run this year because a three year term is too short to prove oneself.

Comment

¶10. (C) Kalumba is a near celebrity in Zambia and is certainly more charismatic and dynamic than Banda, but he has the small matter of a corruption indictment to clear up before he can expect his candidacy to gain traction. His willingness to tear down his fellow party members, including the new government, both in the press and to P/E Chief, whom he had just met, smacks of a somewhat dangerous level of self-promotion and ambition. He may, in the process of climbing up the backs of his fellow MMDers, destabilize the party to the extent that it crumbles beneath him. Fortunately for Kalumba, the MMD has loyal followers in the rural areas who do not follow the tedious party politics of Lusaka. In addition, the members of the main opposition party, the Patriotic Front, have proven time and again they are equally willing to cannibalize each other to suit their individual political aspirations. Which party will remain the most intact for the election in 2011 remains to be seen.

Bio Note

¶11. (C) Dr. Katele Kalumba was born 22 February 1952 and represents the constituency of Chiengi in Northern Province on Lake Mweru. which straddles the DRC border. He has an MSC in Psychotherapy and a PhD in Public Health and is a Public Health Consultant. Kalumba studied at Washington University in St. Louis MO, and in Toronto. One of his sons was born in St. Louis and is an Amcit, but practices law in Lusaka. Initially Kalumba was a nominated member of parliament in 1991 but has been an elected member since 1996. He has held five cabinet positions, including Health, Home Affairs, Tourism, Foreign Affairs and Finance.

BOOTH